



Department of Justice

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT FILES LAWSUIT AGAINST BERKS COUNTY ELECTION OFFICIALS REGARDING ALLEGED VIOLATIONS OF THE VOTING RIGHTS ACT

WASHINGTON, D.C. - The Department of Justice today announced that it has filed a lawsuit against Berks County (Pennsylvania), members of the Berks County Commission, the Board of Elections Commission, and the Director of Elections for alleged violations of the Voting Rights Act.

The complaint, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, alleges that Berks County election officials have violated federal voting laws by, among other things, maintaining an environment at polling places that is hostile and discriminatory toward Hispanic citizens. Specifically, the complaint alleges that Berks County employs poll workers who regularly express overt hostility toward Hispanics and citizens who do not speak or read English well, make discriminatory remarks to such voters, prevent or discourage such voters from participating in the electoral process, and treat Hispanic voters differently than other voters with regard to identification requirements. The complaint also asserts that election officials have failed to provide citizens of Puerto Rican origin bilingual assistance at the polls (as provided by federal law) and have similarly failed to ensure that all voters who are illiterate in English are permitted to receive assistance from the person of their choice.

"It is a priority of this Administration to ensure that all Americans are able to vote, free of hostility, harassment, or intimidation," said Assistant Attorney General Ralph Boyd. "It is also our mission to ensure equal access to the polls for all Americans, as provided by law. There are well settled provisions of federal law that guarantee bilingual assistance at the polls for those of Puerto Rican origin and others, and further guarantee the right of all citizens – regardless of race or ethnicity – to participate meaningfully in the electoral process."

Recent Census figures show that the city of Reading has a significant Hispanic population, many of whom do not speak or read English well. Most of these persons are United States citizens of Puerto Rican descent who were educated in Puerto Rican schools.

"There is no more important right to be protected than the right of all citizens of the United States to vote," said Patrick L. Meehan, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. "This office will take all steps necessary to ensure that all registered Pennsylvanians who show up at the polls are treated with respect, and are afforded all the protections of federal election laws."

Berks County residents who have experienced discrimination or other difficulties in voting or registering to vote on the basis of race, ethnic origin, or minority language status should contact the Justice Department at 1-800-253-3931. Additional information about the

Voting Rights Act and other federal voting laws is available on the Department of Justice website at www.usdoj.gov/crt/voting/index.htm.

03-115